

Legislation authorizes Federal agencies to share information (WASHINGTON, D.C.) – U.S. Rep. Mike Coffman (R-Colorado) today introduced legislation that will enable the Social Security Administration to share information with the Department of Homeland Security to help prevent identity theft, and for detecting the fraudulent use of Social Security numbers.

“Millions of Americans are hurt by identity theft every year,” said Coffman. “Clearly, our system is broken.”

The bill would enable the Commissioner of the Social Security Administration to perform, at the request of the Secretary of Homeland Security, a search for records that will identify individuals and employers who are using false names, false social security numbers, the same social security number used by multiple individuals, the illegal use of social security numbers from deceased individuals, and individuals who had applied and received a social security number but who are not legally entitled to work due to their immigration status.

“Identity theft is one of the more pernicious crimes plaguing Colorado,” said Colorado Attorney General John Suthers. “I welcome any effort from our elected leaders to rein in the illegal use of Coloradans’ identities. Congressman Coffman’s proposal will give our leaders one more tool to bring to bear against identity thieves.”

In 2008, local authorities in Greeley, Colorado showed how serious the problem is when they uncovered 1,338 possible cases of identity theft by illegal immigrants after seizing records from a Greeley-based tax preparer. Using fraudulent social security numbers, more than \$2.6 million in tax payments were obtained from the IRS over a two year period. The American Civil Liberties Union has sued to block using the evidence in court, claiming the search of the tax preparer’s office was illegally conducted. The local prosecutor, Ken Buck, is appealing the judge’s ruling.

According to the Federal Trade Commission’s (FTC) most recent Identity Theft Survey Report, 8.3 million adults in the United States were victims of identity theft in 2005. In that same year, 1.8 million adults in the U.S. reported their personal information fraudulently used by someone else.

“This legislation will end a bureaucratic loophole that keeps federal agencies from cooperating in the fight against identity theft,” said Coffman.